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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that social service agencies need to work in partnership with families for children's safety and well-being, this booklet addresses some common barriers faced by local, state, and national attempts at parent engagement by describing practical strategies for successful shared leadership. From examples of how incremental changes in community-based organizations result in large-scale community improvement and policy reform, this booklet distills recommendations, providing concrete ways to bring about increased meaningful participation of parents in advocating for their children. The booklet focuses on systemic change, emphasizing the importance of the committed advocacy of family support programs. The booklet is presented in two parts. Part 1 provides recommendations for community-based programs and neighborhood initiatives and presents strategies developed by professionals and parents working at that level. Strategies include raising consciousness and building commitment, removing practical barriers, recognizing contributions and providing incentives, changing organizational processes, building on culture as a strength, tailoring strategies to specific populations, and helping parents build skills. Part 2 provides recommendations for state and national efforts. Strategies include involving parents in all activities, ensuring parents' input on decision-making boards, providing economic compensation, developing an action-oriented agenda, developing policy to support parent engagement, communicating supportively, and reaching out to natural leaders. In both parts, recommendations are illustrated with examples of how the strategies have been carried out by others. The booklet's three appendices list the strategies, present a timeline of parent engagement developments at Family Support America, and list parent engagement resources. (KB)

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Putting Parent Engagement into Action

A Practical Guide

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Shared Leadership Series • Book 1

Putting Parent Engagement into Action

A Practical Guide

FAMILY SUPPORT America

Family Support America, formerly Family Resource Coalition of America, promotes family support as the nationally recognized movement to strengthen and support families and places the principles of family support practice at the heart of every setting in which children and families are present. By identifying and connecting individuals and organizations that have contact with families; by providing technical assistance, training and education, conferences, and publications; and by promoting the voice of families, Family Support America is taking family support to scale as the national strategy for ensuring the well-being of our children today and in the years to come.

For more copies of this publication, to join the nation's family support organization, or for more information, contact: Family Support America, 20 N. Wacker Drive, Suite 1100, Chicago, IL 60606, 312/338-0900, 312/338-1522 (fax), www.familysupportamerica.org

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Preface

"We believe that family support principles reflect the basic tenets of a government of the people, for the people, and by the people." These words were written by consensus by a group of 120 parent leaders, program providers, and local, state, and federal officials from across the country. In December 2000, Family Support America convened these leaders at a national meeting, Shared Leadership: Forging a Consensus to Strengthen Families and Communities, in West Palm Beach, Florida, to draft a consensus statement and policy recommendations regarding the needs of families in the United States.

The principles of family support (see page vi) have never had been more relevant, and our work to promote partnerships of shared leadership according to those principles has never been more important. The mission of Family Support America remains true to these principles in our focused efforts to (1) promote, strengthen, and expand the family support movement; (2) foster the optimal development of children, youth, and adult family members; and (3) strengthen and empower families, neighborhoods, and communities. To these directives, spelled out in our strategic plan, our board of directors has voted to add an overarching principle: to promote parent and family engagement and leadership roles in all local, state, and federal activities and to develop tools and resources to ensure that parents actively and effectively engage in these roles.

The original Shared Leadership event in December 2000 was a way to put these principles into practice. From that pilot, Family Support America created a unique and powerful process and has begun to publish a series of tools to help others foster shared leadership in their organizations, programs, communities, and other groups. We hope that these Shared Leadership tools will help you realize the transformational power that is possible when parents are leaders, engaged with other leaders in relationships of equality and respect.

Virginia L. Mason
President & CEO, Family Support America

Putting Parent Engagement into Action

A Practical Guide

Introduction

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Introduction

Parents are the essential guardians of children—and therefore, of the future. The founders of the family support movement in the 1970s embraced this sentiment, which is the basis of family support practice. It became a call for respectful and equal partnerships between families and family-serving professionals (see box, left). The leaders of this movement sought to create a world in which parents have what they need to shape their children's and their own future, including a voice in public policy and program decisions.

The Principles of Family Support Practice

1. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
2. Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth, and children.
3. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
4. Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.
5. Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
6. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
7. Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
8. Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.
9. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

The voices of parents—in particular, low-income parents—need to be heard. Our social service agencies need to work in partnership with families for children's safety and well-being. Our educators, principals, and school boards need to work toward parents' hopes and dreams for their children's education. Our local government officials need to partner with families to make our communities stronger and safer. Our congress members at the federal and state levels need to respond to families' concerns about childcare, education, health care, safety, and many other issues that affect families every day.

There are currently many voices speaking on behalf of families, but family-serving professionals, congresspersons on Capitol Hill, and lobbyists from national organizations cannot express the reality of American families as well as the families who experience that reality. Because of their unique experiences, it is imperative that families fundamentally shape the policies and programs that affect them.

Family support makes a priority of meeting community and family needs in ways that make sense to parents, through partnership. Only through partnerships of shared leadership can a real power shift occur. Shared leadership means combining each person's resources, needs, and desires to make families and communities stronger. Recognition of what parents bring to the table is especially crucial, given that parents' efforts to, for example, improve school performance, secure neighborhood supports, get better equipment for the playground, or eradicate injustice in the distribution of public funds are in addition to a full-time job. This book addresses some common barriers faced by local, state, and national attempts at parent engagement by describing practical strategies for successful shared leadership.

Parents have made tremendous inroads with the support of some community-based organizations and initiatives, local and state systems reform efforts, and national collaborations. These successes demonstrate how crucial it is that families' needs and desires determine the agenda in our communities, states, and nation. One parent's participation in a Head Start program may culminate in parents leading the creation and staffing of a full-service school. Another's search for respite in caring for a special-needs child may burgeon into a local lobbying effort that brings much-needed federal funding to the neighborhood. There are myriad examples of how incremental change results in large-scale community improvement and policy reform.

From such examples, this book distills recommendations, providing concrete ways to bring about increased meaningful participation of parents in making the world better for their families. But "concrete" doesn't mean "immediate." Parent engagement doesn't happen without systems change. Systems change doesn't happen without time and committed advocacy on the part of those positioned at the fulcrum of justice—such as family support programs.

Efforts at parent engagement partnerships face numerous challenges. Organizational infrastructures present barriers to parent engagement: organizational processes are not supportive of parent engagement. When policy is created to support parent engagement, all parties can be challenged by a lack of knowledge of how to put the policy into practice and of experience in doing so.

For parents, challenges include competing demands on their time, which are exacerbated by a lack of payment for their efforts. This lack can be due to conflicting opinions regarding whether parents fully retain their "parent perspective" when they are paid for their input; it can also be due to scarcity of funding. Paying for training or skills development opportunities is another problem. Once parents do become engaged, there is no established "career path" for those seeking roles of increasing leadership.

Human services professionals face additional barriers, including an insufficient understanding of how to "walk the talk" in power sharing. Training on shared leadership skills helps, but some staff resist it. Many feel that trained professionals are the only ones qualified to govern a program and/or that they cannot share power and still provide a good service. There is also a lack of funding for training family-serving professionals in parent engagement.

Many have attempted to engage parents out of a sense of charity or virtuousness. However well-intended, these efforts have missed the opportunity for success because they were not motivated by a fully engaged awareness of parents' roles as equal partners with commitment, motivation, and strengths. The very definition of success in parent engagement must be created by parents.

Finally, this book assumes that readers have already overcome the greatest barrier to shared leadership: that is, they believe that parent engagement is a key to positive outcomes for families.

The recommendations in this book are based on the experiences of those who have attempted and, in many cases, successfully forged partnerships of parent engagement in the face of such challenges, including those of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Family Support America, and their partners.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Through its Making Connections initiative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has worked with neighborhoods in 22 cities to promote programs, activities, and policies that contribute to strong families. The primary aim of the effort has been to stimulate and support a local movement that engages residents, civic groups, political leaders, grassroots groups, public and private sector leaders, and faith-based organizations to help transform tough neighborhoods into family-supportive environments. Family Support America, as an Annie E. Casey Foundation grantee, has focused on sharing the lessons learned in these communities and by the foundation's Families Count honorees, exemplary family support programs nationwide. These efforts provide strategies by which parents and family-serving professionals make decisions together, so that parents and neighborhood residents gain access to power and decision making at all levels.

PERSONAL VIEW

From Participation to Leadership

Parents enter family support programs at varying levels: through education, resources, and social opportunities. But they find the windows for leadership growth and development through the comprehensive, culturally appropriate, strengths based, community-governed approach offered by family support programs. The process for developing parent participation in advocating for action includes buy-in, system support, and parent advocacy.

Shiela Beesley,
University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development

Parent Engagement in Family Support America

Parent engagement is a cross-cutting theme in Family Support America'a strategic plan and is carried out in all of the organization's work and activities. Parents, in their role as parents, sit on the board of directors, write for and review publications, plan and take part in conferences and meetings, and provide direction for the organization's parent engagement policies and practices. Through its technical assistance, training, and mapping and certification of family support programs, Family Support America promotes parent engagement as a crucial element of family support. The organization has impacted the inclusion of parents as leaders and advisors in local, state, and federal governance.

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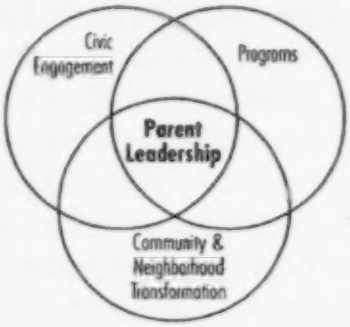
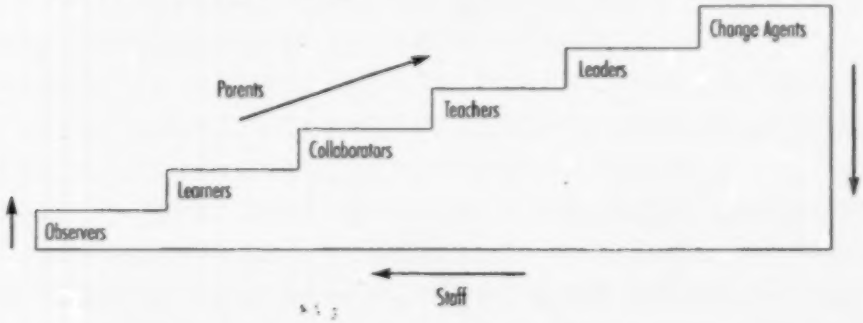
Family Support America's analysis of parent engagement efforts nationally shows that, for the most part, these efforts focus on involving parents in:

- Civic engagement: Building skills and sharing information about the political process (e.g., information on how a bill becomes a law or activities toward selecting a candidate or affecting public policy)
- Programs: Involvement in family support programs, schools, and other community-based programs (e.g., parent focus groups, parents as staff, or parents serving on school boards and advisory councils)
- Community and neighborhood transformation: Community-based efforts that engage parents but are not necessarily focused around a particular program or organization (e.g., block clean-ups, safety patrols, community fairs, or neighborhood gardens)

As shown in the Venn diagram below, those who combine all three of the above components are best able to make the leap from engaging parents, broadly speaking, to promoting parent leadership. They do this by building and maintaining mechanisms for parents to be active in policy development, program development, and community organizing all at once.



Another useful model of the spectrum of parent engagement is the Hierarchy of Parent/Staff Participation and Change developed by Maria Chavez in *Risk Factors and the Process of Empowerment* (Bernard van Leer Foundation). Chavez writes that as parents ascend into positions of involvement and empowerment, staff descend, so that the two engage in power-sharing partnerships:



About This Book

The first part of this book provides recommendations for community-based programs and neighborhood initiatives and presents strategies developed by professionals and parents working at that level. The second provides recommendations for state and national efforts. While the recommendations are customized for these two audiences, all of the book's contents are meaningful and crucial for both local programs and state and national agencies and organizations. For example, local programs providing stipends will find useful information in Part Two, under the third strategy, Provide Economic Compensation.

In both sections, recommendations are backed up with examples of how the strategies have been carried out by others. These examples come from a variety of sources, including Family Support America's contact with successful initiatives through its technical assistance and training, networks, conferences, and publications. Some are affiliated with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative or are Families Count honorees. In addition to the recommendations and examples, boxes throughout the book provide practical information and tools. Finally, a resource file at the end of the book directs readers to useful organizations and publications.

This book is not intended to be a recipe for parent engagement. The set of strategies ultimately used must depend on the particular community and target population. For shared leadership efforts to be sucessful, they must be shaped by the resources and needs of the program, the community, and the parents. This book can help all parties make sure they take all important considerations into account when forming and maintaining partnerships toward parent engagement.

Part One

Putting Parent Engagement into Action

A Practical Guide

Recommendations for Local Programs and Neighborhood Networks

Part One

Recommendations for Local Programs and Neighborhood Networks

The following recommendations are based on the experiences of parents, staff, and other stakeholders in local programs and neighborhood networks. These recommendations demonstrate the importance of the first principle of family support practice: Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect. The operative words here are not only "equality and respect," but also "relationships": developing parent leadership on the local level both requires and builds deeper and more meaningful relationships between staff and parents.

Much of what this section recommends—in particular, strategies for overcoming everyday logistical barriers—is learned by putting oneself in another's shoes. Staff and other partners in local efforts need to find out more about parents' specific strengths, needs, and desires if those forces are to shape our communities. But meaningful parent engagement doesn't stop there. It requires concrete change in procedures, programs, and administration. These recommendations provide strategies for making such changes.

If we expect parents to participate in a neighborhood initiative, we need to provide ample logistical supports, such as childcare, translation services, transportation, and economic compensation.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

While the recommendations are presented separately from those for state- and national-level agencies and organizations, which are found in Part Two, in reality, the two cannot be separated. Local efforts are the means by which parents access and influence state and federal policy. Some of the Real-Life Lessons in Part Two show how successful state efforts are driven by community concerns.

All of these recommendations, whether logistical, programmatic, or otherwise, rely on equal efforts on both sides of the parent-program partnership. Both parties need to devote significant efforts to make parent engagement work.

The recommendations offered in this section must also be tailored to the community. To make sure this happens, parents and family-serving staff should read them together and discuss how to customize them for their own communities, addressing concerns such as language, geographical barriers, and appeal to specific groups (for example, fathers, seniors, or teen parents).

PERSONAL VIEW

What Needs to Change?

A crucial step for organizations and agencies is to find and support the parents who are identifying needs. Parents and grandparents may be saying to each other that they need a place to get information, to get food and clothing, to meet and help each other. Well, those places are family support centers, and policymakers and program staff need to identify those parents and help meet those needs! Parents are grassroots leaders, and those planning and carrying out programs should value their leadership, accept it, and, most important, support it. You have to communicate one-on-one with parents, to listen. You have to have a heart for the work to really see the value of it.

Jessie Coleman
Family Advisor/Consultant, Family Connection Partnership, Inc., Georgia

1. Raise Consciousness and Build Commitment

Removing practical barriers for parents, providing incentives, changing processes, tailoring strategies to local parents—all of these concrete strategies are useful in building parent engagement. But none are effective unless everyone involved believes in and wants to succeed in shared leadership. To some extent, program staff and board members commit to shared leadership for the same reason parent leaders do—to achieve their goals. In the case of staff and board, these are program goals. Family support programs make more sustainable progress when parents are involved in meaningful ways. Making the case for these partnerships is in part a matter of showing how they will improve the program.

Building buy-in is a long process that can take many, many years and multiple generations of stakeholders. It requires patience and trial-and-error efforts, but numerous tools exist to help programs learn from others' efforts (see Appendix 3 as well as the Real-Life Lessons throughout). In the beginning, the point is not to get everyone to agree on all of the issues, but rather to engage in open dialogue in an atmosphere of common interest and respect. One strategy is to begin this conversation between parents and staff who already have established trusting relationships.

One way of starting the process of building commitment is to engage in the Making Room at the Table process. This set of facilitated activities and discussions fosters family involvement in program planning and governance, and brings parents, staff, board members, and all other stakeholders together to explore the meaning of collaboration. Framed in a non-threatening yet challenging way, Making Room at the Table starts with sharing information on the family support approach and ends by taking programs through a self-assessment of their own level of parent involvement.

Even with the best intentions, shared leadership takes time, and mistakes invariably occur. A key to successful partnering is the willingness to learn from each other.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Community Partnerships for Protecting Children

The Community Partnerships for Protecting Children initiative, supported by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, redefines the power relationship between low-income parents and public agencies. In four cities (Louisville, St. Louis, Cedar Rapids, and Jacksonville), child protective services workers are partnering with parents, other residents, family support providers, faith communities, civic associations, and local businesses to strengthen families and ensure the safety of children. Residents have a strong role in designing services, interviewing prospective staff members, and serving on planning bodies. Parents' traditional role in looking out for each other's children is integrated with the work of the child protective services agency.

The partnerships are built around collaboration, systems reform, individualized support, and community-based decision making. All four come together in "family team meetings" that occur when an incidence of child abuse or neglect is reported. The family decides who besides themselves and the child protective services worker will be at the meeting and when it will take place, and the meeting is run by the family.

"Often, we think we know a family by reading a case file. We don't," says Family Team Meeting Facilitator Ana Marie Scheel (Cedar Rapids). "They have their own stories. There are usually reasons why the situation got to the point where it is. [At the family team meeting], the family gets a chance to tell its story. So, in finding a solution, we try to understand where they have been and where they want to be. We focus on their goals, coming up with ideas with everyone at the table—the family, friends, and service providers—who might be able to provide support, like day care, transportation, and other things."

Contact: The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 250 Park Ave., Ste. 900, New York, NY 10177, 212/551-9100, www.emcf.org.

Parents As Leaders in Schools

Family-supportive schools play a strong role in creating opportunities for parents to be leaders while their children are of school age—opportunities both to influence their own children's education and improve schools that build on parents' concern for their children's future.

There are many institutional barriers to parent involvement in schools. Traditional ways of "doing business" often place authority in the hands of principals and teachers, with little or no input from parents. "To promote parent involvement, the culture of schools and the practices of principals and teachers need to change," says Sue Ferguson, director of the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education. "When you ask people, 'How do you increase parent involvement in schools?' the answer usually has to do with working with parents—but we need to make schools welcoming to parents."

Organizations such as Family Friendly Schools (see below) are addressing that need by providing training and technical assistance to change the school culture. Agencies such as the Massachusetts Department of Education, with its Parent Involvement Project, provide activities specifically designed to involve parents in their children's learning.

Local family support programs often start by providing parents information about how the school operates in terms of student performance data, budget, and policies. Program staff work to increase parents' input as informed advocates. They work with principals and teachers to involve parents in school-based management teams and other groups that make decisions about the operations of the school.

Organizations Promoting Parent Involvement in Schools

Coalition for Community Schools:
www.communityschools.org

Communities In Schools:
www.cisnet.org

Families & Schools Together (FAST):
www.wcer.wisc.edu/

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education:
www.ncpie.org

Creating a Family-Friendly Culture in Schools

Family Friendly Schools provides technical assistance and training to help schools establish a culture that promotes shared responsibility for the academic achievement of all students. The organization helps develop partnerships between schools, students, their families, and communities. Family Friendly Schools believes:

- ➜ That schools must seize the initiative in developing meaningful partnerships
- ➜ That academic achievement is greatly influenced by the relationships between the student and his or her peers, family, community, and school
- ➜ That all students can learn

For information, visit www.familyfriendlyschools.org.

2. Remove Practical Barriers

As discussed in the introduction to this book, many barriers have prevented parents from being fully engaged as leaders in the local programs intended to serve them. Some of the most common are addressed here.

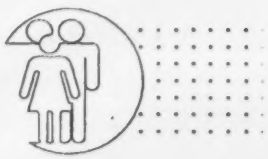
Lack of Childcare

It's a paradox: Parents who become program and neighborhood leaders do so for the sake of their children. Yet they have to spend time away from their kids to attend meetings, speak at events, and attend to numerous other leadership responsibilities. Providing childcare is one way of overcoming this barrier.

Programs that regularly provide childcare on-site can offer this service to parent leaders as well as staff and program participants. Those that don't can partner with organizations that do provide on-site care or hire professional childcare workers for specific events. When childcare is performed by unlicensed providers, such as volunteer parents, programs needs to cover potential accidents and injuries with their own insurance and must follow state and local regulations on child-to-provider ratios.

Another strategy is to pay for childcare provided by someone the parent chooses herself. In this case, parents should have at least a week's notice to make arrangements. There are several options for payment. Reimbursement, the most practical option, enables programs to pay the correct amount in one disbursement. Parents present a receipt and are given cash in exchange, on the spot—unless it is more convenient for them to receive a check.

However, many parents cannot pay for childcare up-front or do not have the time to submit receipts. Programs can then pay caregivers directly or advance parents cash for childcare (in this case, programs must follow up to get receipts, which can be difficult when the childcare provider is not reporting the income for tax purposes). Another alternative is to provide parents with stipends to cover such expenses.



If the quality, quantity, or price of childcare is a problem in the community, parents and programs can work together to address those needs.

Another option, for children who are old enough, is to offer leadership development activities. These can involve youth in community building and social change, reinforce the priorities of the community, be facilitated by an experienced adult, and be scheduled at the same time as adults' meetings.

Transportation

While the transportation barrier sometimes is absolute—when a parent has literally no means of getting to a meeting—more often, it is a matter of the degree to which transportation is convenient, safe, and affordable. When staff commute to meetings, it is part of the job, whereas parent leaders often have this commute in addition to their travel to and from work. Therefore, transportation should be even more convenient and less expensive for parent leaders than for staff. While an hour-long bus ride makes it possible for a parent to attend a meeting, it is a disincentive.

In communities with public transportation, programs can cut costs for parents by buying transit cards or tickets, possibly at a nonprofit discount, and giving them to parents ahead of time. If there is a long wait between bus or train runs, meetings should be planned with the transit schedule in mind.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Families First

Families First serves families in a rural area within Adirondack State Park, most of whom live at or below the poverty level. Many parents have a hard time meeting the basic needs of their families, let alone paying for childcare or a reliable car.

But lack of childcare and transportation can't stand in the way of parents' role as leaders. The program's commitment to having parents of children with special needs make up 50 percent of its board is spelled out in its bylaws. Parents also come to address the board as guest speakers regarding programs in which they've participated. And then there's the Parent Advisory Community Team, where parent leaders take part in decisions about program design and implementation, plan regular and special programs, carry out fundraising, and go to the state capital to lobby for family-supportive policies.

How does Families First overcome the barriers of lack of childcare and transportation? With a whatever-it-takes attitude and a lot of collaboration. With no public transportation to rely on, Families First deploys staff, board members (in particular, one who is retired), parent participants, and volunteers to pick up and drop off those without vehicles. Staff also help parents pair up with those who share interests, and the ride to and from the center becomes an extension of the meeting, with parents sharing their ideas. When parents go to Albany to lobby, they load into a staff member's car. AmeriCorps volunteers also serve as drivers. Families First requires all drivers to have insurance—in the event of an accident, the driver's insurance is used first; if it's not enough, the program's insurance can cover up to $2 million per incident.

The program has innovative solutions for removing the childcare barrier as well. It plans leadership activities based on parents' schedules—the Parent Advisory Community Team meetings, for example, take place Monday afternoons while team members' children are in school. For board meetings and other events, AmeriCorps volunteers provide on-site childcare, or the events are planned to coincide with regularly scheduled children's play groups and other activities.

Contact: Anne Mancini, Families First, Inc., P.O. Box 565, Keen Valley, NY 12943, 518/873-9544, 518/873-9570 (fax)

Parents should be reimbursed at the standard mileage rate when they use their own cars to attend meetings and events in which they have a leadership role. Gasoline vouchers are also convenient.

In many rural communities, program staff or volunteers pick up and drop off parents. In rural or urban settings, programs can use taxis. Setting up an account with a cab company eliminates the need for cash and allows programs to receive a statement of all rides charged to the account.

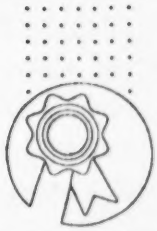
Car pools and ride shares are other strategies that easily can fit into parents' schedules and also offer chances for parents to get to know each other.

Regardless of which strategy works best, all parents must receive clear directions to the location and must be told how long it will take to get there, at least a week in advance. The amount of time it takes to get to the location must be included in everyone's understanding of how much time parents are spending on leadership activities.

If transportation is presenting problems, scheduling or location may be the culprit. Programs should be sure to choose locations and times convenient for parent leaders.

Strategy 3

3. Recognize Contributions and Provide Incentives



Local programs can learn something from corporate America: Companies make meetings and other work tasks more attractive by providing refreshments, fun team-building activities (such as retreats and golf tournaments), and gifts and bonuses for going the extra mile. Incentives work on the community level just the same. In this context, they also help parents overcome economic barriers that require them to budget their time, money, and other resources to immediate needs.

Incentives can include food at meetings, cash stipends, gift certificates, or free passes to an event. Parents should decide what would be most appealing and effective. Local businesses and other neighborhood programs can be approached for things they can offer free or at a reduced cost.

Certificates of achievement and recognition dinners demonstrate appreciation of parents' contributions and accomplishments. Group outings and child and parent activities help build excitement about working together and provide an informal way for staff and parents to get to know each other, and for parents to have some quality time with their children. When parents take the lead in planning these activities, they exercise leadership skills and act on their interests and desires.

Incentives can help get parents interested initially and show appreciation for their time and effort, but, as in the business world, fun, games, and goodies only go so far. Ultimately, parents are engaged as leaders when there are meaningful benefits for themselves and their families and when their contributions and efforts are recognized.

PERSONAL VIEW

Why Parents Take On Leadership

Parents' interest springs from the needs of their own families and communities, and from their own personal needs. Professionals may not see that parents' dedication to shaping the program so that it achieves positive outcomes for their own families represents strong dedication to the vision of the program.

Roxy Foster Executive Director, Minnesota Parenting Association

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Family Circles

Family Circles are parent-driven, local groups that get together to make decisions about their families and neighborhoods. They are hosted by local programs, including family support programs.

Hosts are charged with finding and involving people who are disconnected from leadership and other opportunities in the community. With funding from the Central Indiana Community Foundation ($1,500 per year), these programs provide parents with incentives such as stipends, gift certificates to grocery stores, T-shirts, and celebratory events such as picnics, where food is served. They also overcome barriers to parent participation by paying for childcare, transportation, and other amenities.

Programs write their own budgets for incentives, and can make changes mid-year if they like. Parents play a large role in deciding what incentives will be provided.

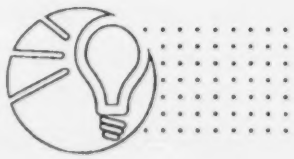
Contact: Tony Macklin, Director of Community Initiatives, Central Indiana Community Foundation, 615 N. Alabama Street, Suite 119, Indianapolis, IN 46204, 317/634-2423, 317/684-0943 (fax), tonym@cicf.org

Strategy 4

4. Change Organizational Processes

Shared leadership can be easy to say but tough to do. While it starts with broad-based agreement on the value of parents' voices and the necessity of parent leadership in creating a just world, there's a step between that and achieving results: changing organizational processes so that they institutionalize the importance of parent engagement and how to work in partnerships. These changes can involve altering meeting times, creating different decision-making and board processes, instituting parent positions as board co-chairs, and more.

Sustained, consistent, and effective parent engagement can't happen on an ad-hoc basis. All departments in a program or agency (not just programming, but finance and administration, too, for example) need to operate in ways that support parents engagement. For example, if stipends are to be used as an incentive and barrier-breaker, the program's fiscal procedures have to make it possible to disburse and track checks and cash, sometimes on short notice.



Training can be helpful, especially when parents help train agency staff. Two-way training, where staff train parents about organizational processes and parents train staff in meeting their needs and building on their strengths, can help identify organizational processes that need to change. Training topics and dates should be posted regularly, with information on whether childcare will be provided.

It all comes back to strategy one: raise consciousness and build commitment in the program. Since procedural changes require the approval of senior managers and the board of directors, these individuals must buy into parent engagement early on in order for it to be successful.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Chicago Children's Museum

In 1993, Community Outreach Manager Diane Gibson began to develop a long-term relationship with a group of parents in the Robert Taylor homes, a public housing community in Chicago. After asking them about their needs and desires, she worked with them to institute a parent network that connects them with each other and connects their families to the museum's educational resources and other community resources.

Gibson knew that if the museum was to continue supporting the network, departments in addition to her own needed to understand its goals and strategies. The network needed a sustained budget. Initially, it was developed by staff and based on what they thought parents needed. But over time, parents come to provide staff with training on their needs and strengths.

Parents themselves got involved in developing a new budget, and received training in how to do it. Now, they make their own three-month budgets, planning activities that are tied to their goals for educational and leadership development. As the program has grown, the museum's development staff have started to undertake fundraising and development activities that are also driven by the parent-developed budget.

Contact: Diane Gibson, Community Outreach Manager, Chicago Children's Museum, 700 East Grand Avenue, Suite 127, Chicago, IL 60611, 312/464-7684, 312/527-9082 (fax), dianec@chichildrensmuseum.org

Strategy 5

5. Build on Culture As a Strength

Parent engagement strategies must reflect and reinforce the cultures of parents as a way of acknowledging and supporting them as leaders. Societal and institutional discrimination, prejudice, and poverty are often at the root of parents' disenfranchisement and lack of access to leadership roles. Local programs and neighborhood networks have a rare opportunity—and an obligation—to change that. It is important that program staff develop an understanding of how culture impacts parents' experiences with and willingness to take on roles of leadership. Chapter 4 of *Guidelines for Family Support Practice* (see Appendix 3) explores these issues and provides hands-on exercises and tools for developing an understanding of them, as well as a list of useful resources.

"Family support programs help families to affirm and pass on their cultures and languages to their children and counter the effects of racist and otherwise negative images."

Guidelines for Family Support Practice, p. 114

"Leadership" can take on different forms and associations in different cultures, and programs must respond to such variations in parents' expectations. Some parents may have culturally based reasons for being uncomfortable forming peer relationships with staff.

Practical steps to building on culture as a strength in parent leadership include translating written materials soliciting parent engagement and providing training and facilitation in the languages spoken by parents in the community. Parent leaders from a culture can help engage others from the same culture. Programs must ensure that discussions leading to decision making take place in parents' languages and must foster respect and understanding across cultures. Hiring policies must ensure that staff represent the families served. Above all, programs should make sure parents are involved in crafting and filling parent leader roles.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

West Town Leadership United

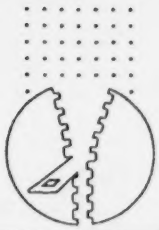
By carrying out a community needs and resources assessment from start to finish, parents gained a voice in their Chicago community. Taking place in a primarily Latino neighborhood near Von Humboldt school, which had been on academic probation, the project was part of West Town Leadership United, a family-focused community organization. The parent leaders called themselves the *Madres Reporteras* (Mother Reporters).

The parents interviewed 676 community members in English or Spanish, asking them both what strengths the neighborhood had and what it needed. Most people listed strengths as churches, schools, and community organizations. The needs, they said, were for more police on the streets, more clean-ups, less violence affecting children, job training, and improvement in children's school performance. The *Madres Reporteras* held a meeting of parents, community leaders, and policymakers, read the surveys aloud, and proposed three goals: increase students' test scores, improve community safety, and get job training in the community. The community embraced the goals, and planning began shortly thereafter. Within two years, the parents had re-opened their school, now with after-school programs and a community center for families. The school was off academic probation.

Developing new skills as they went, parents relied on each other and the organization for support. Going out in teams gave participants like Nancy Santiago the courage to push for change. "At first, I was shy. I wouldn't dare talk to anybody," she says. "Now, I'm a local school council member and a leader in *Madres Reporteras*."

Contact: Ellen Schumer, Community Organizing and Family Issues, 954 W. Washington, 4th Floor, Chicago, IL 60607, 312/226-5141, 312/226-5144 (fax), cofi@mindspring.com.

6. Tailor Strategies to Specific Populations



Strategies to promote parent leadership must respond to parents' needs and strengths. Often, these are influenced by a characteristic or a life situation shared by a large number of program participants, especially if the program's goals involve serving families who share that characteristic. A program whose aim is to serve teen parents or involve fathers, for example, must tailor leadership opportunities to those individuals. In a community with a large or underserved population of caregiving grandparents, the strategies and very goals of parent leadership must be meaningful and appropriate to grandparents. The same goes for military families, families with gay parents, and others. Parent leadership must always come from an understanding of the specific community and its goals.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Grandchildren / Grandparents, Inc.

Grandparents are caretakers of children in many families. Many parents leaving welfare rely on their own parents to care for their children, as do other working, incarcerated, or disabled parents. Grandparents / Grandchildren, Inc., was founded to help grandparents ensure the well-being of their grandchildren and to highlight the ways grandparents' challenges and experiences are different from those of parents.

When parents divorce, grandparents often lose the right to visit their grandchildren. In 1998, members succeeded in updating West Virginia law so that not just divorced or separated parents, but also grandparents and others, could petition the court to prove that visitation would serve the best interests of the child.

Another key issue is lack of public support for grandparents who are full-time caregivers. Members are working toward kinship care laws that provide the same public support that foster families receive to relatives who care for children who have been removed from their parents' homes due to abuse or neglect. Grandparents in West Virginia, which has the highest percentage of grandparent caregivers living in poverty, are leading these efforts.

Grandparents / Grandchildren, Inc., uses listservs, mailings, phone calling, and public events to mobilize grandparents and others to get involved in public policy. It enables grandparent leaders to give and receive informal training on advocacy, media relations, and others skills they have learned ion the job.

The organization supports its activities through fundraisers such as bake sales, auctions, raffles, and the occasional small grant. "Our priority is always to make sure the best interests of the child are served," says founder Lola Bailey.

Contact: Grandparents / Grandchildren, Inc., P.O. Box 56, Friendly, WV, 26146, 304/652-4587, webailey@rcvideo.com, www.geocities.com/heartland/hills/6492/grandparents.html

PERSONAL VIEW

Fathers As Leaders

The focus in parent leadership so far has been to build on parents' knowledge of what their children need—but many fathers lack that knowledge because they're not sufficiently involved in their families' lives. Getting fathers involved as program participants is the first step. Programs not only promote father involvement in families, but have built-in ways to promote parent leadership.

Recruiting fathers as participants and as leaders means sending messages that fathers are welcome, that they're understood, and that the strengths they bring to the table are unique and equal in value to those of mothers. Parent leadership opportunities must speak to fathers and other men in families, as well as mothers. They must be designed to respond to common differences in how men and women communicate and solve problems. For example, facilitators of parent leadership training must be as comfortable with constructive debate as they are with sharing and dialogue. An effective strategy is to pair male and female facilitators.

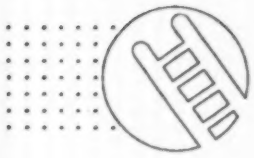
The message to men in all types of communities must be that being both "parent" and "leader" at the same time is important. When men are in positions of power, they must represent the interests of their own families, balanced with others in their community—and that starts with being fully involved in their families.

Niel Tift, Director of Professional Advancement
National Practitioners Network on Fathers and Families

Strategy 7

7. Help Parents Build Skills

Parents call upon a range of skills in achieving their goals for their communities and families. While sometimes these skills are developed through leadership activities in obvious ways—for example, overseeing a budget requires the skill of interpreting financial statements—at other times, the link is subtler. Take the example of a mother transitioning from secretarial to graphic design work through job skills training provided by a family-serving program. Not only can she contribute new skills to the program and community, but by making a career change that she desires, she improves the economic stability of her family, gains confidence and peace of mind which contribute to all of her leadership activities, and can exercise further leadership by training others.



One way to help parents build skills is to set up a "career ladder" of parent engagement activities. Staff and participants work together to develop a series of roles for parents, with each subsequent level involving greater responsibilities and increased interaction with different individuals. Level 1 could include volunteering for two to four hours a week. Level 2 could include volunteering plus interacting with staff at meetings. Level 3 could be volunteering, plus staff meetings, plus developing plans or activities, and so on. There should not be any stigma attached to any of these levels—the point is to clear a path for parents, not to treat parents at one end of the path as more or less important than those at the other.

A practical and meaningful training strategy is to change staff training so that it is useful to parent leaders as well, and involve parents in the training. This ensures that the training provides parent perspectives to staff, informs parents of staff's experiences and

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Community Organizing and Family Issues

Parents involved in Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) develop parent leadership capacity based on their desires for their families and communities. They move through several phases of leadership training to create change in their schools and communities and to achieve goals for themselves and their families, developing their leadership capacity at three levels: individual (personal and family), school and community, and systems and policy change.

Parents spend the first stage of training discussing their personal and family goals. Parent action teams participate in an orientation session followed by five two-hour workshops. Those who complete the workshops work together for three to six months to achieve some of their personal goals or work on their vision of a family-friendly community.

In the second phase of the training, parents focus on achieving school and community goals and building a constituency to help achieve those goals. They participate in four two-hour workshops where they learn methods of community outreach and then go door to door to build relationships within the community and involve other parents and stakeholders in making the community more supportive of families. They compile information and make decisions on what they want to do to move forward.

In the third phase, parents are supported, mentored, and trained as they become trainers themselves (conducting phase one and two training) or as they participate in a cross-neighborhood Parent Policy Committee to improve their communities.

Community-based workshops and trainings are publicized as widely as possible; parents' participation is voluntary. Free childcare and refreshments are provided. More than 1,000 low-income families in Chicago have become successful advocates and leaders for themselves and their communities through their participation in COFI.

Contact: Ellen Schumer, Community Organizing and Family Issues, 954 W. Washington, 4th Floor, Chicago, IL 60607, 312/226-5141, 312/226-5144 (fax), cofi@mindspring.com.

limitations, gives parents the training they desire, builds their résumés, and builds mutual respect.

Programs can also secure training and other skill-building opportunities for parents by paying for it or through exchanges. Parents also must have an arena in which to practice and develop their skills. All organizations in the community (local councils, schools, neighborhood advisory groups, etc.) that are seeking community input can fill that role. Finally, expectations must be realistic, and everyone involved must be invested in parents' skill development as one of the desired outcomes. It's not just about getting the job done.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Greater Norwich Community Leadership Team

In Greater Norwich, Connecticut, the Greater Norwich Community Leadership Team (GNCLT), a multi-sector partnership, provides community residents with a continuum of capacity-building and parent empowerment initiatives. Parents have three distinct training opportunities and are supported by community mentors who work directly with them. They learn about team building by working together on projects of their choice, which benefit the entire community.

The first tier of the training provides parents with presentations, mentors, and information about community resources, communication skills, problem solving, and parenting. The training helps parents and other adults with limited financial/educational means who have traditionally been disenfranchised from their communities. Parents receiving the training are provided with opportunities and resources to gain experience and skills to take greater control of their lives.

In the second tier of training, parents build their skills in problem definition, diversity, building bridges and removing barriers, language and writing skills, and honing interpersonal skills. Parents learn about working with the media, packaging agendas, state and local government, the local board of education and school system, budgeting, accountability, and outcome expectations. They become advocates for the needs of children and families in their community.

The third tier is the Parent Graduate Leadership Initiative. Parent graduates are mentored as they work on community-related projects, and parents benefit from advanced partnerships with community partners.

Contact: Sherry Filiatreault, Greater Norwich Community Leadership Team, Norwich Youth & Family Services, 307 Main St., Norwich, CT 06360, 860/823-3783, 860/892-6031 (fax)

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Neighborhood Para-Social Worker Program

The Neighborhood Para-Social Worker program enables parents to go from being program participants to providing social supports to other parents as well as advocating for family-supportive public policy. The degree is provided by Winston-Salem State University, whose faculty teach the courses, in partnership with Multicultural Community Development Services Family Resource Center. The classes are taught by a team that includes a WSSU instructor and a policy consultant from the North Carolina Department of Social Services, Children and Family Services Division, via live tele-video conferencing. Parents take part in the classes at the center.

In addition to the classes, parents work with families a minimum of 22 hours per week in a family support program. They learn to document the barriers and difficulties they see families facing, and identify those involved (in the county, state, or country), who could change policy to create more effective services. Thus, the parents are developing research-based strategies for programming, practice, and policy while taking academic courses.

The family support center links parents to other organizations involved in policy making, as well, so that they can partner with state and county policymakers to apply their learning.

Contact: Anna Green, Director, MultiCultural Community Development Services Family Resource Center, 444 Pinetree Lane, P.O. Box 241, Spring Lake, NC 28390, 910/497-4905, 910/497-6059 (fax), mcdsfrc@aol.com

Part Two

Putting Parent Engagement into Action

A Practical Guide

Recommendations for Statewide and National Systems and Organizations

Part Two

Recommendations for Statewide and National Systems & Organizations

More federal and state policies now include mandates for parent involvement—and with good reason. With parents' involvement in crafting legislation, public programs are more likely to respond to their everyday lives and therefore to be more effective. For similar reasons, state and national organizations dealing with child-and-family issues are also seeking to walk the talk of community involvement and engage parents in shaping and carrying out their agendas. Seeking to better align their work with community needs, these organizations intentionally include parents and community residents in all of their activities.

Agencies and organizations are inviting parents to participate in planning meetings and have begun to structure local activities that generate feedback and direction for their work. While much of this has translated into parent and community advisory bodies and focus groups, some efforts push the envelope to promote parent leadership roles and resident involvement in funding decisions and policy development.

Also, state and national bodies of parent leaders are emerging. These groups are creating broad networks for communication, creating partnerships with supportive organizations, and establishing themselves as a powerful force.

State and national organizations are developing a variety of strategies to engage parent and resident leaders. These include communication mechanisms, legislative mandates, training and technical assistance supports, and mobilization activities. Given their similarities in size and approach to working directly with individual parents, many of the strategies developed are easily transferred across these organizations and institutions.

Checklist

Getting the Most Out of Parent Engagement

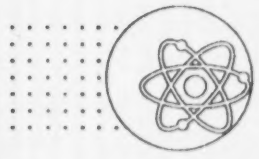
Parent engagement is now institutionalized in many national and state policymaking bodies and organizations. As a consequence, agencies and organizations are finding they must develop new ways of doing business. Here are some recommendations for those in non-parent roles:

- **Share leadership:** Don't hesitate to ask parents to take on difficult tasks. Work with parents to create opportunities for increased responsibility.
- **Encourage parent input:** Constantly ask parents for their suggestions. Ask questions, respectfully, until you understand their input, and reiterate their comments to others.
- **Avoid tokenism:** Work with a variety of parents, not just "the usual suspects."
- **Stay in touch with all parents:** Keep in touch with parents and follow up with any parents who suddenly stop participating in meetings.
- **Communicate roles and procedures:** Communicate to parents what is expected of them in different roles and negotiate together exactly how the work will get done. Make sure parents understand the purpose of the group and why their participation is important.
- **Use multiple communication mechanisms:** Be respectful of the different ways people work and communicate (for example, not all parents want to use, or have access to, e-mail). Use fax, phone, and regular mail.
- **Conduct staff training:** Train organizational staff in strategies to share leadership and decision making with parents.
- **Be responsive:** Be prepared for parents coming from all walks of life and be prepared to respond to a variety of cultural and economic differences.
- **Establish a buddy system:** When parents join a team, connect them with other parents who are on the team to help facilitate their transition.
- **Offer parent training and orientation**

Strategy 1

1. Involve Parents in All Activities

The mantra of organizations and agencies that practice parent engagement partnerships is, "How are parents involved?" Every time a new policy or program initiative is in the works, every time a conference takes place, every time an executive director is hired, parents must be involved and their input included, for they are the people most affected by the organization's or agency's work. Parents must be involved in meaningful ways every step of the way, from planning to implementation to evaluation and beyond.



For example, conferences often are thought of as development and networking opportunities for family-serving professionals. But parent participation in these events is crucial. It puts professionals in direct contact with parents whose expertise may not have been available to them or acknowledged in their field previously. It allows parents, both informally and as presenters, to speak directly to policymakers and decision makers about their strengths and needs. And it provides parents with opportunities to attend the same skill-building workshops and informational events as professionals.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Arizona Parents Commission on Drug Education and Prevention

In order to involve parents in all activities on the state agency level, the state's governor must be committed to parent leadership and devote resources to it. The Arizona Parents Commission on Drug Education and Prevention is an example of how such a commitment can result in fundamental changes at the state agency level.

Created by voter initiative in 1996, the commission consists of five parents of children currently enrolled in Arizona schools and one representative from each of the following professions: education, probation, treatment and prevention, and law enforcement. Members are appointed by the governor.

The commission is charged with overseeing eight state-funded programs to reduce drug and alcohol abuse, including reviewing and accepting grant applications. The programs focus on parent involvement in preventing and treating substance abuse and fall into several categories:

- Parenting programs in workplaces, schools, and nonprofits, including capacity-building for current and prospective grantees
- Juvenile and family courts
- Youth Educating Parents programs that get youths talking to parents about how to prevent drug abuse
- Assessment of parents' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to youth substance abuse
- "Character education" training for parents and youths

Contact: The Governor's Division of Drug Policy, 1700 W. Washington, Phoenix, AZ 85007, 602/542-3456

PERSONAL VIEW

Parents Make Things Happen

Our idea of programs used to be card parties, rap groups, and bring-a-dish dinners. Since we started the parent council, it's after-school programs, supper pantries, and creating quality housing to meet the shortage in our neighborhood. This empowerment did not come about by just being involved in our center. It came about through participating in workshops on advocacy, government policy, grant writing, economic development, and much more. We learned to stop just letting things happen, to making things happen.

Elaine Harris-Fulton
Parent Advocate, Wilkinsburg Family Support Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Involving Parents in Conferences and Meetings

Hassle-Free Hotel Stays

While some parents and staff have stayed at hotels many times, many have not. Several steps can make the process go smoothly:

- ➜ Pay the hotel and the hotel deposit prior to the parents' arrival, so they will not need to present credit cards.
- ➜ Cover and explain incidentals: Provide phone cards for calls home and money for meals. Explain to parents that they will be responsible for paying for the costs of incidentals not covered (such as in-room movies or room service).
- ➜ Explain the reimbursement and expense policy before the hotel stay begins.
- ➜ Give parents the telephone number and address for the hotel ahead of time so they can share it with their families and others.

When hotel stays are part of larger events:

- ➜ Place a staff person near the front desk to troubleshoot as parents are checking in.
- ➜ Set up a parents' welcome table staffed by parent volunteers where parents go even before checking in at the hotel's front desk.

Engaging Parents at Conferences and Meetings

These tips are based on Family Support America's practices in planning and carrying out meetings and events on many scales, including its national conference. For more information, contact: Anthony Williams, Director of Strategic Planning, Family Support America, 20 N. Wacker Drive, Ste. 1100, Chicago, IL 60606, 312/338-0900 x 124, 312/338-1522 (fax), awilliams@familysupportamerica.org

Before the Conference

- Conduct special outreach to engage parents
- Provide ample notice so that parents can plan to attend
- Provide background information about the objectives, format, and content of the conference or meeting
- Cover expenses and registration: While family-serving professionals have all expenses covered by their employers, parents do not. Provide equal access by waiving and/or underwriting parents' registration fees and covering their travel and lodging. Offer opportunities to work in exchange for conference registration to all attendees—not just parents.

During the Conference

- Provide parent-driven activities and networking sessions, and integrate parents into all conference events
- Designate a person whom parents can contact with questions or concerns while at the event
- Offer a parent orientation session where parents are welcomed and oriented and can have any questions answered
- Give parents a map of the conference or meeting facility and explain how to get around
- Provide a list of parent attendees to all parent leaders at the conference
- Partner parents with one another so they can have a familiar contact while at the conference
- Provide a Parent Hospitality Suite for networking, informal meetings, or relaxation during down time. Notify parents in advance so they can plan meetings and activities here.

After the Conference

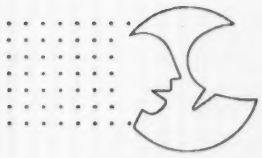
- Contact parents to thank them and let them know they made a difference
- Collect conference evaluations that include questions unique to their experience as parents

Strategy 2

2. Ensure Parents' Input on Decision-Making Boards

Instituting parent positions on the board of directors or other decision-making board ensures that parents have a permanent voice in programmatic and administrative decisions that is guaranteed in the bylaws. By sharing in decision-making power, parents are owners of the agency's or organization's efforts.

The goal of parent engagement goes beyond creating and filling board seats, however. Everyone must be invested in parents using the position to develop leadership skills. Board culture must change and fuse with the cultures that parents bring. Everyone must understand that adding parents' voices changes the decision-making process and, most important, the decisions being made. These changes are a desired outcome of parents being on the board.



While parents' involvement in advisory councils and focus groups helps make parents' voices heard, parent membership in decision-making boards is absolutely essential. As the saying goes "the proof is in the pudding"; the organization or agency proves its commitment to parent engagement through granting parents power to impact decisions about the budget, hiring and firing, and other issues that ultimately affect them.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Head Start

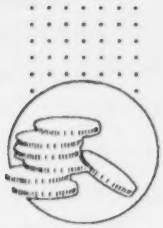
Through Head Start, many parents channel their desire for the well-being of their own children into an agenda for children and families in general. Head Start is a federally funded program that supports child development and school readiness activities for low-income families. Through the program, parents not only become decision makers in Head Start; they also identify and pursue professional and other goals.

Parent leadership starts the minute a family enrolls in the program. Parents work with Head Start staff to set goals for their children and families; they are encouraged to share their opinions and to visit any time. They can attend classes and workshops on parenting, nutrition, safety practices, preparing for jobs, and many other topics. They can often get educational or literacy training and employment support as well—in fact, 30 percent of Head Start staff are parents of current or former Head Start children.

At each program, parents serve as elected members on the policy council responsible for hiring and firing, overseeing the budget, and all other policy decisions. In addition, parents get involved in parent committees to make day-to-day program decisions. Regional councils also put parents in the driver's seat. Through these councils, parents oversee the budgets of programs in the region, carry out on-site program assessments, decide on training to be provided, and plan special programs—everything from responding to domestic violence to raising funds to celebrating Black History Month.

Contact: The Head Start Regional office nearest you through:
www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/
Or call the Head Start Information and Publications Center toll-free at 866/763-6481

3. Provide Economic Compensation



While staff receive a salary for their work in strengthening families, parents do not. In many or most cases, a parent's efforts in an organization or policy-making body are in addition to a full-time job. Providing economic compensation demonstrates an understanding of parents' everyday realities and makes a clear statement about the importance of parent engagement.

Paying parents to participate in meetings and other activities demonstrates that their input is valuable and shows a commitment to ensuring that parents are at the table to make decisions. Payment helps to define their role as that of consultants and highlights the expertise they bring to the table.

Participation in leadership often means taking unpaid time off from work and covering expenses for childcare and transportation—expenses for which staff are reimbursed. Often, without economic compensation to cover these losses, parents simply cannot participate. But fairness is also an issue; in a relationship of equality and respect, parent leaders receive the same compensation for expenses as do staff.

Economic compensation can take the form of honoraria, stipends, or consulting fees. Organizations should be very clear about the purpose of the compensation and work directly with their finance departments to ensure appropriate accounting standards are maintained.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Family Connection Partnership, Inc.

Georgia's Family Connection Partnership, Inc., is a statewide network of communities committed to improving results for children and families. Parents are provided economic compensation for their leadership / advisory roles in the organization. Family advisors, who advise local efforts, and leadership council members, representing regions on the state level, are viewed and compensated as consultants.

Each family advisor and leadership council member receives a $250 stipend to attend each monthly meeting and/or regional networking meetings. In many cases, a region has two family advisors. If both attend the same state or regional meeting, they split the stipend. The $250 stipend is also provided to individuals who attend state and national conferences and provide technical assistance as members of state technical assistance committees. In addition to providing the stipend, the organization covers related expenses such as travel, meals, and lodging. Guidelines have been established for the amounts of and procedures for these reimbursements, and they are adhered to.

Family advisors also participate in annual state dialogue teams that meet with communities to discuss their annual plans for achieving results for children and families. The stipend for these is $100, because they require less time. Parents are also reimbursed for expenses.

Contact: Family Connection Partnership, Inc., Peachtree Center North Tower, 253 St. NE, 16th Floor, Atlanta, GA 30303, 404/527-7394

Checklist

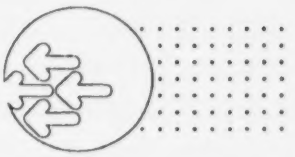
Stipends, Honoraria, and Taxable Income

- **Base payment for parents on staff policies:** Demonstrate equality in the amounts paid to staff and parents and the expenses covered for both.
- **Be clear about what parents are being paid for:** Explain whether the money is for expenses such as childcare and transportation or whether parents are being paid for their participation.
- **Provide clear directions about what it takes to get paid:** Give parents forms for submitting receipts and explain how to complete forms and how long reimbursement will take.
- **Standardize the amount to be paid:** Set and explain limits on what the organization pays for meals, lodging, and other expenses or for honoraria. Develop a written policy. The policy can be updated, but stick to the latest version. Consider per diem payment: The Internal Revenue Service (www.irs.gov) offers recommended per diem levels.
- **Negotiate specifics with parents:** Ask parents about any unusual types of support that they may require and respond to them.
- **Understand tax implications:** Obtain the IRS's regulations for reporting cash stipends and honoraria. When a parent submits receipts and is paid the amount on those receipts, the parent does not report the amount as income. Any other type of payment is usually considered income.
- **Pay enough:** Consider all of the expenses parents will encounter to make sure the amount you are offering is sufficient. Involve parents in this planning.
- **Work closely with finance staff:** Make sure program staff work with finance staff to develop guidelines and procedures that maintain accounting standards.
- **Provide checks ahead of time:** Make sure any checks given in advance allow enough time for parents to cash the check and use the funds for necessary expenses.
- **Work together to conserve:** Work with parents to identify ways to save costs.

4. Develop an Action-Oriented Agenda

An action-oriented agenda provides something concrete that parents and community leaders can work toward, helping all partners see the benefits of their involvement. Parents who can anticipate and experience results become and stay interested in policy or organizational efforts.

Parents also benefit from ownership that comes with developing their own activities or community projects. Action agendas allow community members to identify and articulate what is needed in their community and develop an effective way to meet the need. Such an agenda builds community capacity for problem-solving and helps build partnerships between the state and the community.



REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Family Leadership Cultivation Project

The Family Leadership Cultivation Project, part of the West Virginia Governor's Cabinet on Children & Families, enables parents to build leadership skills while they work on community projects. In other words, they learn by doing—and what they're doing is based on their own desires for the well-being of the families and communities.

Through the project, parents have built a community playground, run a support group for parents of special-needs children, and developed a neighborhood family leadership project. They have achieved significant other goals as well, including increasing the number of families involved and building the leadership skills of family members. These are skills that they will be able to apply to other community projects in the future.

To get funding for a project, community groups submit proposals to the Governor's Cabinet, on which parents are involved in selecting funded projects. Each proposal must be submitted by a group of three or more people, the majority of whom are parents or other family members. The proposals describe the project and how it will build leadership skills. Each group whose project is chosen receives $1,500 in seed money, develops a work plan, and is connected with a cultivation team. The cultivation team includes at least one family member and local community and business representatives who provide technical assistance and connections to needed resources. The groups also receive training and submit regular progress reports to the Governor's Cabinet.

Contact: Mike Toothman, Consumer Involvement & Training Specialist, Governor's Cabinet on Children & Families, Building 5, Room 218, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. E., Charleston, WV 25305, 304/558-1953, 304/558-0596 (fax), toothman@wvnet.edu

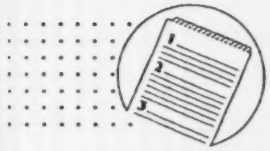
Strategy 5

5. Develop Policy to Support Parent Engagement

Spelling out parent engagement in policy increases the longevity and depth of partnerships with parents. It also makes it possible to replicate successful parent engagement strategies from community to community within a state.

Designating a funding stream for parent leadership efforts helps create an infrastructure to sustain opportunities for parent leaders. State and local agencies can use the funds to leverage additional resources. National organizations can utilize policy opportunities to support parents' further evolution in their capacity as advocates and organizers.

Most important, parents play a leading role in creating parent engagement policy. Testifying before committees on the benefits and importance of parent engagement strategies is an opportunity for parents to voice their concerns and have input into key decisions.



REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Connecticut Parent Trust Fund

The Connecticut Parent Trust Fund is the first state trust fund focused on parent leadership. The fund was created by the Parent Trust Act, passed in 2001, and calls for quality parent leadership to improve the health, safety, learning, and economic stability of children. The fund is a subset of the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund, which facilitates coordination between the two and maximizes match dollars from the federal government.

This trust fund supports civics training that promotes financial sustainability and reflects diversity. Communities can apply for amounts of up to $20,000 per application. A 50 percent local match is required: 25 percent in cash and 25 in in-kind support. Parents are involved in all stages of the training. They comprise 50 percent of the leadership council, helped select the project's manager, and serve on every decision-making committee.

The Connecticut Parent Trust Fund is the first broad strategic action plan of Family Support Connecticut. It was created as the result of advocacy from a public-private partnership that includes parents. The State Department of Children and Families, the Connecticut Commission on Children, the Children's Trust Fund, and the Governor's Prevention Partnership are providing support through in-kind personnel, materials, communication links, and technical assistance.

Contact: Sharon Williams, Director, Parent Leadership Training Initiative, Connecticut Commission on Children, 18-20 Trinity St., Hartford, CT 06106, 860/240-0085, sharon.williams@po.state.ct.us

United Parent Syndicate on Disabilities

Many families living with disability have become trailblazers in the field of family support, not only advocating on behalf of their own members and other families, but playing significant roles in making policy and programmatic decisions. Major legislation, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), has been impacted by the voices of parents and other family members of people with disabilities. The key to this strong tradition of activism has been parents' vision of the direct impact such legislation would have on their ability to care for their disabled relatives.

The National Parents Network on Disabilities (NPND) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering parents. Through its publicity of pending legislation and of images of people with disabilities in the media, the organization mobilizes parents to have a voice in policy.

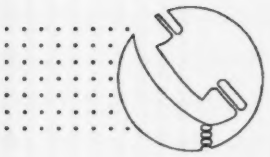
NPND provides its members with up-to-date information on the activities of all three branches of government that affect individuals with disabilities and their families. Each Friday, members of the organization receive a *Friday Facts* newsletter on these issues, and when public policy decisions are pending in the House and Senate, they receive news releases alerting them to the importance of placing a phone call—often that day. A recent *Friday Facts* provided members with a survey to fill out to voice their opinions on how the IDEA should be shaped during its upcoming re-approval. The same issue drew attention to a negative media portrayal of a child with cerebral palsy and his family in a major television series, and pointed out inaccurate information that the episode spread regarding the IDEA.

Contact: United Parent Syndicate on Disabilities,
6613 East Church Street, Suite 100, Douglasville, GA 30134,
770/577-3307, 770/577-7774 (fax), www.peppac.org/new_page_10.htm

Strategy 6

6. Communicate Supportively

Parents' involvement is sustained and meaningful only when everyone is equally well informed, when parents' voices are heard as clearly and frequently as others', and when a common language that everyone can understand is used. Communication norms are different in the business world than in the community and in the home. The norms of statewide and national organizations can be alien to parent leaders. To communicate in a way that respects all parties, a common language must be developed—one that is informed as much by parents as by family-serving professionals.



Communication covers not just the words we use to communicate, but the medium that we use to exchange ideas. Below are some of the basic principles of inclusive communication, with an example for how to carry out each:

Principle	Practice
Avoid jargon and ambiguous language	Have an editor work on written communications to make sure everyone can understand them
Take parent leaders' diverse schedules into account	Schedule calls and meetings for evenings and weekends
Anticipate changes in family or work plans and emergencies	Have numerous calls and/or meetings on the same topic
Respond to differences in access to technology	Use all forms: e-mail, telephone, fax, mailings, etc.
Make it affordable	Provide toll-free phone numbers

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

National Family Support Roundtable

The National Family Support Roundtable, a project of Prevent Child Abuse America, sponsors mutual self-help parent support groups to prevent child abuse and neglect and strengthen families. In staffing the project, Prevent Child Abuse America has developed communications practices that respond to parents' daily lives while fostering parent leadership. There are four main committees—infrastructure, training and technical assistance, capacity building, and parents as leaders—and several subcommittees. Staff make sure there is significant parent representation at every level in each committee. Parents develop leadership skills by serving on the committees and play a major role in advancing committee work.

To communicate supportively, staff:

- Offer multiple times for meeting, including evenings and weekends, so that parents can choose the one that works best for them
- Take meeting minutes and disseminate them immediately to all parents
- Provide a toll-free number for parents to easily join conference calls
- Provide funds to state chapters for communications mechanisms
- Provide 10 mini grants ($1,000) annually to community-based groups to develop programs and enhance parent engagement and leadership

Contact: Cynthia Savage, Project Manager, National Family Support Roundtable, Prevent Child Abuse America, 200 S. Michigan Ave., #1700, Chicago, IL 60604, 312/663-3520, www.preventchildabuse.org

Strategy 7

7. Reach Out to Natural Leaders

Natural leaders are people in the organization's area of service who are already known to parents for their roles as leaders. They may be leaders of religious communities, participants in organizations such as the PTA or Head Start, or community activists.

Because of their experience and roles in their communities, natural leaders have an idea of the needs and strengths of the larger constituency. Partnerships with natural leaders can enhance outreach and parent participation, for their opinions have weight in the broader community and they have the contacts needed to spread positive messages about work occurring at state or national levels. Because of their familiarity and popularity with local families, natural leaders' input can result in policies and programs that represent a large number of parents.

Working with natural leaders also integrates the agency's or organization's work with that of other efforts in which these parents are involved. This adds to the sustainability and collaborative nature of the work.

REAL-LIFE LESSONS

Washington Latino Parent Network

In Washington state, Latino parents lead support groups, one for parents and other caregivers and one for children and teens, in each of eight communities. The social support provided by these groups is a key factor in reducing risk factors for child abuse and neglect, and the groups also increase family management skills and leadership abilities. The groups are operated by the Parent Trust for Washington Children and together are called the Latino Network.

In each community, the Parent Trust asks a natural leader to invite people he or she knows to facilitate the groups. These facilitators, who also are natural leaders, visit Latino families at home to build trust and help family members feel comfortable with attending the group meetings. They focus especially on developing a relationship with the fathers and including them in their outreach visits. Parents refer other parents and help arrange their initial home visits. Through word of mouth, parents communicate the message that the groups are a safe place for families. Once the support groups are established, the momentum from the one-on-one outreach and personal referrals keeps the group active.

Facilitators find that many families' schedules are based on seasonal employment. During certain times of the years, several families may stop coming to the meetings. Facilitators continue to contact them through home visits, keeping them interested in the program and letting them know it will still be available to them in the future.

The Parent Trust also provides handouts in Spanish on parenting issues and a statewide toll-free Family Help Line. The help line is staffed by phone workers who provide supportive listening, referrals, and information on local resources in English and Spanish. The support groups have served more than 1,000 Spanish-speaking family members.

Contact: Linda McDaniels, Associate Director, Parent Trust for Washington Children, Latino Family Support Network, 334 NE 92nd Street, Seattle, WA 98101-2401, 206/233-0156 x 224, 206/233-0604

Putting Parent Engagement into Action

A Practical Guide

Appendices

Appendix 1

Parent Engagement Strategies

For Local Programs and Neighborhood Networks

1. Raise Consciousness and Build Commitment
2. Remove Practical Barriers
3. Recognize Contributions and Provide Incentives
4. Change Organizational Processes
5. Build on Culture As a Strength
6. Tailor Strategies to Specific Populations
7. Help Parents Build Skills

For Statewide and National Systems & Organizations

1. Involve Parents in All Activities
2. Ensure Parents' Input on Decision-Making Boards
3. Provide Economic Compensation
4. Develop an Action-Oriented Agenda
5. Develop Policy to Support Parent Engagement
6. Communicate Supportively
7. Reach Out to Natural Leaders

Family Support America (2002). Putting Parent Engagement Into Action: A Practical Guide. (Chicago, Illinois). www.familysupportamerica.org

Appendix 2

Timeline

Parent Engagement Developments at Family Support America

1997

- *Making Room at the Table: Fostering Family Involvement in the Planning and Governance of Formal Service Systems* published in collaboration with the Institute for Family-Centered Care
- Conference at the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread facility brings together parents, parent leaders, federal officials, state officials, and school officials to discuss the organization's work and implications of parent leadership

1998

- Board of directors amends the charge to its constituency building committee to reflect a more inclusive structure
- At 1998 national conference, group of parent leaders provides organization with list of concerns and statements regarding their role and input
- Second conference at Wingspread facility builds on 1997 discussion on constituency and focuses on the growing role of parents and parent leaders affiliated with the family support movement
- Staff meet with National Parenthood in America Steering Committee, group of leading organizations working on child and family issues, to discuss creation of national organization for parents
- 72 training sessions on *Making Room at the Table* conducted for more than 2,000 people

1999

- *America's Family Support Magazine* (formerly *FRCA Report*) released; debut issue on parent involvement
- Third conference at Wingspread highlights parent leadership in America and how to structure a collaboration to create a national voice for parents
- 20 parent and community leaders from across the country co-plan the Parent and Community Leadership track at 2000 national conference

2000

- Organization adopts name Family Support America (formerly Family Resource Coalition of America)
- National conference offers comprehensive parent engagement series: parent orientation session, parent hospitality suite, mentoring network, series of parent-led workshops, and parent-driven plenary
- Shared Leadership Symposium: Forging a Consensus to Strengthen Families and Communities builds consensus among parents, policymakers, state officials, city and county workers, and community-based service professionals; results in creation of a consensus document on the needs and strengths of families
- Board of directors adopts motion to include parent leaders on board

2001

- Shared Leadership consensus-building events held at three topical conferences, with more than 100 in attendance
- Conference on community economic development provides scholarships for more than 100 parent leaders to attend
- Two parent leaders are added to board of directors

2002

- National conference involves parents as leaders, including Annie E. Casey Foundation Making Connections site representatives
- Shared Leadership series of publications launched to promote meaningful parent engagement

Appendix 3

Parent Engagement Strategies

Organizations

Community Organizing and Family Issues is committed to strengthening the voice of low-income and working families at all levels of civic life–from local institutions to the city, state, and federal levels. COFI has developed a leadership development and community-building model called Family Focused Organizing and provides training and consulting to individuals and organizations who are interested in using this approach.

Contact:
Community Organizing and Family Issues
954 W. Washington, 4th Floor
Chicago, IL 60607
312/226-5141
312/226-5144 (fax)
cofi@mindspring.com

Family Voices is a national grassroots organization that speaks on behalf of children with special health care needs. Founded by parents who developed national and state family networks and organizations to improve the health and education systems that serve their children, Family Voices's goal is to help shape national, state, and local health care policy and practice in private and public health care systems.

Contact:
Family Voices
3411 Candelaria NE, Ste. M
Albuquerque, NM 87107
505/872-4774
505/872-4780 (fax)
www.familyvoices.org
Kidshealth@familyvoices.org

The Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health is a national parent-run organization focused on the needs of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders and their families. The federation serves as a catalyst for change by promoting partnership among family members, professionals, and other interested citizens to improve services for children with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders. It also provides leadership training for parents in advocacy and community outreach.

Contact:
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
1101 King St., Ste. 420
Alexandria, VA 22314
703/684-7710
703/836-1040 (fax)
www.ffcmh.org
ffcmh@crosslink.net

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education advocates for the involvement of parents in their children's education and fosters relationships among home, school, and community that enhance young people's education. It provides information through publications, training, and services.

Contact:
National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91A
Fairfax, VA 22030
703/359-8973
703/359-0972(fax)
www.ncpie.org
ferguson@ncea.com

Parent Advocates for Youth is a training project for parents to learn advocacy skills that will help them advocate for their children and help San Francisco become a more family-friendly city for all families and children. Parent Advocates for Youth trains parents to go into their own communities and engage other parents to challenge policymakers and civil leaders who promote legislation without parent input.

Contact:
Parent Advocates for Youth
459 Vienna Street
San Francisco, CA 94115
415/239-0161
415/230-0584 (fax)
mwallace@colemanadvocates.org
www.colemanadvocates.org

Parents Anonymous is a national organization that provides technical assistance and training on a variety of leadership skills for parents. Parents Anonymous trains parents to train other parents to operate mutual support groups. The organization is based on a vision that establishing parent input, leadership, and mutual support are essential components in strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect.

Contact:
Parents Anonymous
675 W. Foothill Blvd, Suite 220
Claremount, CA 91711
909/621-6184
909/625-6304(fax)
www.parentsanonymous-natl.org

Parents as Leaders is a group of parents from around Wisconsin who meet during the school year to learn about resources, leadership, and advocacy roles for parents, and to meet key decision makers and experts on issues related to raising a child with special needs. Parents choose projects to work on to make their own community a better place for children with special needs.

Contact:
Parents as Leaders
1500 Highland Avenue, #231
Madison, WI 53705
608/263-5022
608/263-0529 (fax)
www.waisman.wisc.edu/earlyint/palsbroc.html
sankey@waisman.wisc.edu

Parents Information Center assists parents in advocating, monitoring, and supporting their children; helps parents understand school reform efforts; and helps to create a level of comfort for parents when engaging in school activities.

Contact:
Parents Information Center
26 Court Street
Boston, MA 02108
617/635-9660
617/635-6981 (fax)
dlashus@boston.k12.mn.us

The Parent Leadership Program addresses the needs of families with young children through information, connections, support, and tools. The program strives to fundamentally alter some of the inequities that exist between parents and professionals.

Contact:
Parent Leadership Program
1325 South Washington Avenue, Suite 104
Lansing, MI 48910
800/292-7851
517/487-0303(fax)

The Parent Leadership Training Institute trains parent to become leaders, develops communities of parents, increases parent-child interaction, expands the capacity of parents as change agents, facilitates system change, and improves child outcomes through parent involvement.

Contact:
Parent Leadership Training Institute
18-20 Trinity Street
Hartford, CT 06106
860/240-0290
860/240-0248 (fax)
www.cga.state.ct.us/coc/plti.htm

Parent Services Project, Inc./Family Support in Early Childhood Education is a two-to-three day training program that covers involving men, parent/staff partnerships, culturally appropriate practice, creating coalitions, and developing influential parent leaders. The project guides parents to create family support, share leadership, promote the voices of parents, advocate for families, and affect policy change.

Contact:
Parent Services Project/Family Support in Early Childhood Education
79 Belvedere Street, Suite 101
San Rafael, CA 94901
415/454-1870
415/454-1752 (fax)
www.parentservicesproject.org

Partners in Policymaking is an innovative leadership training opportunity designed to involve and empower people with developmental disabilities, parents of young children with disabilities, and other family members. Partners provides information, builds competencies, and build partnerships.

Contact:
Partners in Policymaking
828 West Peachtree Street NW, Suite 304
Atlanta, GA 30308-1146
404/881-9777
404/881-0094 (fax)
www.aadd.org
dave@aadd.org

Partnership in Policymaking is designed to educate and empower participants to achieve systems change at the local, state, and national level. This is a unique training program that encourages participants to alter the future.

Contact:
Partnership in Policymaking
c/o North Central Service Cooperative
200 First Street NE
Staples, MN 56479
218/894-5477
218/894-5468 (fax)

Rainmakers provides parent leadership training, mostly to low-income parents.

Contact:
Rainmakers
1420 Washington Avenue
Miami Beach, FL 33139
305/674-7805
305/534-2741 (fax)

The Right Question Project, Inc. offers an innovative and simple-to-use educational strategy that helps parents develop skills for more effective participation in a democratic society. The strategy is being used by many low- and moderate-income parents to better support, monitor, and advocate for their children's education and health care.

Contact:
The Right Question Project, Inc.
2464 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 314
Cambridge, MA 02140
617/492-1900
617/492-1950 (fax)
www.rightquestion.org
info@rightquestion.org

The Statewide Parent Advocacy Network helps parents make a difference for all of New Jersey's children through information, skills, partnership, leadership, and action. The institute helps parents identify their own roles as leaders and develop plans for future research, analysis, action, and sharing of knowledge and skills.

Contact:
The Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
35 Halsey Street, 4th Floor
Newark, NJ 07102
973/642-8100
973/642-8080 (fax)
span@spannj.org

The United Parent Syndicate on Disabilities is a national program of Parents Educating Parents and Professionals, Inc., dedicated to improving life for all families of children, youth, and adults with special needs. Provides up-to-date resources and information on community, educational, and government events on both state and national levels.

Contact:
United Parent Syndicate on Disabilities
6613 East Church Street, Suite 100
Douglasville, GA 30134
770/577-3307
770/577-7774 (fax)
www.peppac.org/new_page_10.htm

The UNM Family Development Training Institute works in partnership with schools, districts, community centers, childcare organizations, program administrators, and parent organizations to develop customized training services. It supports families, builds positive family-school relationships, shares effective family practices, and produces learning materials and publication for parents and families.

Contact:
UNM Family Development Training Institute
Student Services Building, UNM
Albuquerque, NM 87131-1231
505/277-3469
505/277-6282 (fax)
mjdudley@umn.edu

Publications

America's Family Support Magazine:
Special Focus on Parent Leadership & Family Involvement
By Family Support America
1999, Vol. 18, No. 1
This issue's special focus on parent leadership and family involvement features articles on leadership roles for parents, parent leadership training programs, parents as family support staff, a resource file, and more.

Available from:
Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

Guidelines for Family Support Practice, 2nd Edition
By Family Support America
2001, 292 pp.
Features hands-on tools to help programs put the principles of family support into practice, close-ups that delve into the specifics of each principle, and resource files organized by the principles of family support practice.

Available from:
Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

Making Room at the Table
By Elizabeth Jeppson, Josie Thomas, Anthony Markward, Joanne Kelly, Gail Koser, and David Diehl
1997, 72 pp.
With this program of guided activities, families, program planners, staff, policymakers, and other key players develop the awareness and skill they need to work as a team in planning services and carrying out programs.

Available from:
Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

By the National PTA

1998, 42 pp.

Developed by the PTA in cooperation with education and parent involvement professionals, these standards—communicating, parenting, student learning, volunteering, school decision making and advocacy, and collaborating with community—were created to be used in conjunction with other national standards and reform initiatives in support of children's learning and success.

Available from:
National PTA
312/670-6782

Partnerships for Change

By Family Communications, Inc., and University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development

1997, 2 videos plus 50-page guide

This video-supported training program stresses partnership, shared decision-making, local governance, and collaboration. Staff members and parents undergo training together and gain skills in identifying strengths, communicating needs, and reaching out to others in the community. Available in Spanish and English.

Available from:
Family Support America
312/338-0900
www.familysupportamerica.org

Family Support America, formerly Family Resource Coalition of America, promotes family support as the nationally recognized movement to strengthen and support families and places the principles of family support practice at the heart of every setting in which children and families are present. By identifying and connecting individuals and organizations that have contact with families; by providing technical assistance, training and education, conferences, and publications; and by promoting the voice of families, Family Support America is taking family support to scale as the national strategy for ensuring the well-being of our children today and in the years to come.

For more copies of this publication, to join the nation's family support organization, or for more information, contact:

Family Support America
20 N. Wacker Drive, Suite 1100
Chicago, IL 60606
312/338-0900
312/338-1522 (fax)
www.familysupportamerica.org

FAMILY SUPPORT America

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
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